



Eiffel Trifle
a short play
by Albert Fried-Cassorla

SETTING: The swank Jules Verne Restaurant, on the second landing upwards of the Eiffel Tower. Three two-person tables are arranged close to each other from Stage Left to Stage Right. Ronaldo is seated on the table closes to Stage Right.

CHARACTERS:

Marguerite	Age 24, A graduate student in art history, who is living in Paris. Her boyfriend, Carlos, has just left her. We never see Carlos.
Ronaldo	Age 36, an ornithologist at Cornell University visiting Paris for research purposes

Antoine	Age 58, their waiter at the Jules Verne Restaurant. Has a heavy French accent.

AT RISE: MARGUERITE is seated and sobbing. She drinks little sips of wine now and then but mainly cries to herself. RONALDO is seated and waiting for the waiter. Enter ANTOINE, who approaches MARGUERITE and hands her a menu. At Marguerite's table a chair is turned aside, as if someone has just left.

MARGUERITE

(sob)

ANTOINE

Mademoiselle... I am sorry to see you in such distress. Perhaps it would be helpful to visit the Observation Platform just down the stairs, to get some fresh air....
Would you like that?

MARGUERITE (*emphatically*)

No!!

ANTOINE

Would you like more time to order?

MARGUERITE

Yes! (*sob-sob*)

ANTOINE

Pardon, but is that gentleman who was here earlier... will he be returning?

MARGUERITE (*angrily*)

What do *you* think?!! (*sob-sob*)

*(ANTOINE ponders his next move for a second,
then decides to move on to RONALDO.)*

ANTOINE

Monsieur, and have you had a chance to decide?

RONALDO

Yeah. I'll have the escargot, *trois fromage* platter, and the beef turnadot. And may I decide later on the dessert?

ANTOINE

I regret - no. Ze complete order must go een at once, or our cheff will be very cross with me.

MARGUERITE

Sob-sob!

RONALDO

Okay. Then I'll have the Frambois Glace Explosion.

MARGUERITE (angry at RONALDO)

How can you be so damn blase! Ah-wah-wah.

ANTOINE (to RONALDO)

Tres bon. You weel not be disappointed.

MARGUERITE

Sob-sob! (*She grows nearly hysterical.*)

(*ANTOINE and RONALDO study MARGUERITE, at a loss as to what to do -- if anything. After a beat, ANTOINE gingerly approaches RONALDO closely.*)

ANTOINE

Monsieur, do you mind if I speak with you about something... unusual? To do so, I must seat myself next to you, briefly.

RONALDO

Well... All right.

ANTOINE (quietly)

You have no doubt noticed this very sad young lady nearby. (RONALDO nods.) ... Now this may be totally out of place, but I cannot bear to see her so miserable. *Entendu?*

RONALDO

Oui.

ANTOINE

That lady reminds me so much of my beautiful mother in her younger years, may she rest in peace. She passed away a year ago today. The lovely sweeping eyebrows, the exquisite nose... Am I revealing too much, sir? Perhaps you would just like to relax.

RONALDO

No... it's quite all right.

ANTOINE

Thank you... And so, I cannot stand to see anyone who resembles my mother to be in such a state. And so... I was wondering if you, a nice young man, maybe... of a similar age... could speak with her? Ask politely of course, if you can sit next to her. Then see if you can... somehow... improve her mood. It would be totally inappropriate for me as a waiter, and as an older man, to do so... Do you see?

RONALDO

Well, let me think. (*He looks at Marguerite, who does not notice him.*) ...Mmm, she'll probably think I'm trying to pick her up.

ANTOINE

Perhaps so.... but even that is no crime. If so...you retreat, eh?

RONALDO

Arrright.... (*he slowly gets up and walks to MARGUERITE's table. Exit ANTOINE, Stage Left.*) Excuse me.....(*she barely notices.*) Ahh.... I am wondering if you would mind terribly if I joined you.

MARGUERITE (*suspiciously*)

I don't know.... Who are you??

RONALDO

I'm.... just a person who was...uh, sitting nearby. Over there. (*he points*) And I just thought we might chat.

MARGUERITE (*accusing*)

Are you feeling sorry for me!!? Because I can't stand people feeling sorry for me!!

RONALDO

No. Of course not. (*she nods OK*) May I tell you a bit about myself?
(*MARGUERITE waves a hand, as if to say go ahead*) ... My name is Ronaldo.
And... you see, I study birds. For a living.

MARGUERITE

Birds?

RONALDO

Yeah. In French, les oiseaux. I study them non-stop. Oiseaux up the wazoo ya might say!

MARGUERITE (*smiles, then asks*)

Which birds... do you study?

RONALDO

Only the nightingale... the most famous bird of romance and poetry. And if I might ask, what is your name?

MARGUERITE

J' mappelle Marguerite.

RONALDO

Tres belle.

MARGUERITE

Your studies sound lovely.... to you.... but honestly, boring.... So...are you here by yourself?

RONALDO

Yes.... I live alone in an apartment in the Marais. And as to others in my life... Oh, hmm, I don't know if you're interested in all of this, but... I was married once for two months, back when I was twenty-six. Now I'm thirty-six, and I'm here on a three month research grant at the Sorbonne.

MARGUERITE

So tell me -- why did you come here to talk to me? I want complete honesty.

RONALDO

Complete, eh? You won't settle for, say, 90% of the truth?

(MARGUERITE shakes her head no.

*Ronaldo begins slowly, allowing his
explanation to build.)*

Well then, there are several reasons. First, you seem very sad, and... Something in most of us makes us want to comfort people who are sad.... Second, you are incredibly lovely.... So much so that I overcame my natural shyness and forced myself to try to meet you.

MARGUERITE

Does something like that happen often?

RONALDO

I've never seen a woman half so ravishing as you.

MARGUERITE

Oh please, you sound fifteen other Romeos! *(She makes a whisking away gesture.)*
Please! Why don't you just go back to your table?

RONALDO *(sincerely wounded)*

But you asked me to be honest.... *(now smiling.)* And now you have to suffer through some high compliments. It's part of the package.

MARGUERITE

Oh, I bought a package when I said you could sit here?

RONALDO *(slyly)*

Wait....There's more.

MARGUERITE

And there's more?

RONALDO

Admit that you're curious.

MARGUERITE (*ponders her reply*)

...Okay, I'm curious.

RONALDO

The third reason I wanted to speak with you -- and I have four -- is that... I have a... situation that may be similar to yours.

MARGUERITE

And what do you imagine that to be?

RONALDO

Well, I'd better tell you my own circumstance, and you can compare... But first let me order something.... Monsieur?

ANTOINE

Oui?

RONALDO

I would like an appetizer of escargot and a platter of frog's legs.

ANTOINE

Yes. (Exits ANTOINE)

MARGUERITE

Why would you order something so disgusting?

RONALDO

I like to eat what the birds I study eat... And... you have been in Paris how long?
And never tried these delicacies?

MARGUERITE

Oooh. I may have to leave when your order arrives. AND you'll have to pay my
tab.

RONALDO

No, don't leave.... Ever.

MARGIERITE

Excuse me! Ever? You're sounding very creepy all of a sudden, Mister Ronaldo.

RONALDO

Forgive me... I'm too intense for my own good some times.

MARGUERITE

Marguerite. And that's it? No more reasons?

RONALDO

No! Plus de raisons. Many reasons.... Fourth, I am more than a little bit lonely.
My girlfriend of six months, Claudia, left me two days ago.... ad I am still quite
heart-broken. Maybe like yourself.

MARGUERITE

You know nothing about me.... But go on. Maybe I'll tell you. More reasons?

RONALDO

This is the next to last.

MARGUERITE

I'm out of patience -- tell me the last reason now.

RONALDO

I hope to charm you.

MARGUERITE (laughs)

Ha! Well *now* you have me laughing! I never thought crying in a public restaurant could be so rewarding. So go ahead. Charm the pants off me..... No, that doesn't sound right... I mean, just charm me.

RONALDO (*takes a camera out of his pocket*)

I have a little camera with a projector here, and I would like to show you some places in Paris and beyond that will just.. blow you away. But hopefully not too far!... Have you been to Giverny?

MARGUERITE

Of course.

RONALDO

But I bet never when it's empty of other visitors. Hm?

MARGUERITE

Well, no...

RONALDO

I've been there early in the morning, before it is open to the public, and I've had all of that beauty to myself.... Although I would prefer to see it with you.

MARGUERITE

Very intriguing. I must admit. Hmm, Yes, I think I would like that very much. You know someone there?

RONALDO

Yes, the membership director. He would do this favor for me in a trice. And the birds one sees there in the morning, incredible! Next, look at these pastries I baked.

(RONALDO shows Marguerite photos of food on his cell phone.)

MARGUERITE

Oooh! They look delicious.

RONALDO

Indeed they are! I am an amateur French pastry chef -- Not a pro by any means, but I do amaze myself and my friends. This is my Apricot tranche cake with almonds. And here we have my choco-orange cake, which is as insidiously delicious as it looks. I would like to prepare an assortment of such pasties as I think you will enjoy tremendously.

MARGUERITE

Do you think the way to a woman's heart is through her stomach?

RONALDO

One can hope, yes? And I have one more idea that I think will charm you.

MARGUERITE

First tell me why Claudia left you.

RONALDO

Must I? May I give you the brief version? The full story is still to painful.

(MARGUERITE nods)

I was too possessive..... And you? And your...?

MARGUERITE

My... Carlos... the one who just left. He said he had to return to Buenos Aires for an engineering position he couldn't pass up. And I refused to leave Paris. I love it here! So we both knew that was the end. Long distance romances simply do not work.

RONALDO

His loss... his great loss.

MARGUERITE

...How would you know? You still don't know me. I might be an axe murderer!
All right, show me your third charm, or your sixth reason. Your math is overwhelming.

RONALDO

Here comes the sixth reason.

STOPPED

(ANTOINE returns.)

ANTOINE

Monsieur, your frogs legs, and your escargot.

MARGUERITE

Oooh! I don't know which is more gross.

RONALDO

Everything I am ordering my bird friends also love to eat. Here -- would you like to try an escargot? Just think of it as a garden slug!

MARGUERITE

Are you purposely trying to gross me out?

RONALDO

Not at all... just introducing you to new experiences. All these years in Paris and no exotic foods? Tsk-tsk.

MARGUERITE

So tell me - I have this feeling that that waiter somehow is involved in... you being here now. Tell me the truth.

RONALDO

It is true. He thought you needed attention. And he asked me to speak with you and cheer you up. His name is Antoine. And he said he couldn't not stand to see you suffering.

MARGUERITE

A waiter shouldn't be so intrusive.... Well maybe management here needs to know about Antoine's behavior.

(MARGUERITE rises. RONALDO catches her hand)

RONALDO

No, don't do this. He's not just a waiter. He's a person! And he sincerely cares about us.

MARGUERITE

Us? How does he know there would be an us to care about?

RONALDO

He could sense it. The man is clearly a born romantic. Here, sit down. Please.

[MARGUERITE sits.]

Let me show you charm number three. And if that doesn't work, we'll call it a night. Fair enough?

MARGUERITE

I suppose so.

RONALDO

It's nothing more than a song... a silly song I've been composing in my head.

MARGUERITE

Since we've been sitting here?

RONALDO

Yes. But you must dance with me... here... now..

MARGUERITE

You mean here? With everybody watching?

RONALDO

Yes, hmmm. can you feel the rhythm. *(They dance slowly.)*

There's only one Marguerite,

near you, my knees grow weak

I long to feel your skin so sweet --

don't bug me with your hash-tags and tweets

For you, I'd even fight

I hope you see your future on this night

Oh Marguerite, come dance with me and

let's take a chance on life.

Oh Marguerite, come dance with me and

Let's take a chance on our life.

*(They hug. Then they dance slowly to
unheard music)*

MARGUERITE

I don't know why I hugged you... why I seem to trust you.... Am I a fool... again?

RONALDO

Of course you are. We both are... But what do your instincts tell you?

MARGUERITE

To be careful.... So... so that man told you to approach me?

RONALD

Yes, the waiter encouraged me to approach you.

MARGUERITE

He did *what?*

RONALDO

He seems a very empathetic man. Antoine. And don't knock him. I had only met him for three seconds, but already I had implicit trust. And he felt you could use some company.... from me specifically, although he does not know me.

MARGUERITE

What does he run, the Eiffel Tower dating service?

RONALDO

Maybe. If he does, we must both invest in it....Darling, why don't we go to Champs de Elysee park and take a walk?

MARGUERITE

Darling!?! Are we really at the darling stage?

RONALDO

I say yes. So will you walk with me?

*[MARGUERITE looks at him, smiles, holds his shoulder
as her form of "yes."]*

Sounds delightful.

*[ANTOINE approaches with a large cloth covered wicker basket
and hands it to RONALDO.]*

ANTOINE

Madame and Mademoiselle, the meal you have enjoyed so far is my treat. I have paid your tab. And I did overhear your plans to take a walk. So forgive me for that and also please take this basket of food and bottle of champagne.

MARGUERITE *(to ANTOINE)*

I don't know you... I don't seem to know *anybody*. *(softly)* But thank you.

ANTOINE

Mon plaisir.... My mother will sleep well tonight. *Bon nuit.*

(RONALDO and MARGERITE leave, arm in arm, humming.)

THE END

